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Press Release

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PETERSON AFB, Colo. ? Everything from possible cruise missile threats to securing an expanded agreement with Canada that includes maritime security highlighted discussions at the recent Homeland Defense Symposium in Colorado Springs.

During the second day of panel discussions, Paul McHale, assistant secretary of defense for Homeland Defense, praised North American Aerospace Defense Command for moving ?light years ahead? of where it was on Sept. 11, 2001. Following the terrorist attacks on the nation, NORAD?s mission was expanded to focus on threats coming from inside as well as outside the United States and Canada.



Paul
McHale,
Assistant
Secretary of
Defense for
Homeland
Defense.

However, McHale noted that the United States still relies ?heavily? on the F-16 Fighting Falcon to determine hostile intent by enemy aircraft. ?I?m convinced technology can give us a better way to do this,? said McHale. The F-16 is a 25-year-old air-to-air combat and air-to-surface attack aircraft. NORAD employs F-16s, F-15s, and the Canadian Forces? CF-18s in its mission to deter, detect and defend Canada and the United States.

McHale chaired a panel on maritime defense and port security. He said the United States should also develop a system to track, identify, and thwart an enemy platform ?long before? it enters U.S. Northern Command?s area of responsibility.

USNORTHCOM was created two years ago as a direct result of 9-11. The command?s mission is to defend the United States, its territories and other interests and to coordinate Department of Defense civil support during a presidential declared disaster or emergency.

McHale, whose office provides policy for all homeland defense activities, said he believes the nation should also develop a defense against cruise missiles attacks, which he believes will pose an even greater threat ?in the coming years.?

Canadian Maj.-Gen. Angus Watt, NORAD director of operations, agreed with the need for a defense system against cruise missiles; however, he said he is more concerned at present about possible threats from unmanned aerial vehicles and remote piloted vehicles.

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“They have less range, but may be capable of carrying biological and chemical weapons,” said Watt. UAVs and RPVs also present a challenge “because there are so many avenues for them to come in, particularly when you consider the dimensions of the North American coastline, all the potential vehicles that could come in, the low radar cross section of some of these vehicles and the lack of a viable weapon to intercept some of them at this time.”

The United States has taken steps to intercept UAVs and RPVs “as they come in” by developing the Capstone Requirement Document, said Watt. The document, he said, “will define the nature of threats, the nature of the capabilities now available, and the nature of future capabilities that could be brought to bear against threats.”

“What we envision is essentially a system of systems, with net sensors and shooters, to provide a layered defense against cruise missiles and UAVs,” Watt said. However, he added, “It may be some time before we see this layered defense, but we are definitely working toward it.”

Canada is not part of the United States’ national ballistic missile defense program but recently agreed to allow Canadian military members in NORAD to provide missile warning information to USNORTHCOM once the missile defense system is up and running.

Canadian Lt.-Gen. Rick Findley, NORAD deputy commander, chaired a panel discussion on NORAD’s capabilities and delivered the keynote address for the symposium’s breakfast meeting. He said Canada and the United States will sign a new NORAD agreement in 2006, which may include provisions for expanded maritime defense.

“We already have some vulnerabilities on the maritime side,” said Findley. He noted that the United States has 95,000 miles of coastline while Canada has 152,000 miles of coastline. The situation presents “a huge task” and one that requires partnering with other agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration, U.S. and Canadian public safety and emergency preparedness agencies and customs agencies, Canadian Mounted Police, FBI, and U.S. and Canadian Coast Guard, said Findley.

“Terrorists don’t really care about national sovereignty or borders. They like to exploit seams and vulnerabilities. So if you shut something down on one side, where’s your next vulnerability?” asked Findley.

He said the United States and Canada are linked by several commonalities, including economics, friendship, family, infrastructure and transportation systems. Therefore, both nations must “work as a neighborhood watch (group)” to ensure mutual success, Findley said.

The Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce and several local chapters of defense-related organizations sponsored the 2004 symposium, which brought together leaders from the military, government, industry and academia to discuss some of the crucial issues facing the nation today. NORAD and USNORTHCOM sponsored the panel discussions. Next year’s symposium is slated to be held Oct. 24–27.